



**Testimony
Betsy Gara, Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the
Education Committee
February 25, 2015**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), which represents 115 towns throughout Connecticut, appreciates the opportunity to comment regarding, **SB-942, An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education.**

COST appreciates the Governor Malloy's efforts to preserve state aid to municipalities during a very difficult budget climate. However, for small towns, state aid to municipalities has been largely flat funded for several years. During this same time, the cost of providing critical municipal services, including education, has increased significantly. As a result, municipal budgets are stretched very thin, frustrating efforts to maintain existing educational programs and provide a quality education for all students.

Connecticut is more reliant on property taxes to fund local services, including education, than any other state in the nation. Escalating personnel costs, ongoing state and federal mandates, unpredictable special education needs and declining revenues are severely challenging the ability of towns and cities to fund education. In fact, an estimated 70% of a town's local budget is required to fund education, placing an untenable burden on local property taxpayers.

Clearly, the state's failure to adequately fund education is putting considerable pressure on local property taxes and undermining efforts to provide quality educational services for all students.

COST therefore urges lawmakers to begin serious discussions about how to develop a long-range plan for fully funding the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant. We also support efforts to continue the discussions of the MORE Commission's Special Education Task Force to explore opportunities for assisting towns in managing special education costs.

Thank you for your consideration.

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns. More information is available at www.ctcost.org